

DPH Confirms First Influenza Cases for 2017-2018 Flu Season

DOVER – The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) is reporting the state's first laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza for the 2017-2018 flu season. Six individuals have been diagnosed with the flu to date in October. Three of them were hospitalized due to the illness. They include a 66-year-old male, and an 81-year-old female from New Castle County, and a 73-year-old Kent County female. Each of the people who were hospitalized had underlying health conditions. The remaining individuals were not hospitalized. They are: a 48-year-old male and a 32-year-old female from Kent County, and a 42-year-old New Castle County male. There are two main types of influenza (flu) virus – types A and B – that routinely spread in people and are responsible for seasonal flu outbreaks each year. All six cases of the lab-confirmed influenza cases are type A.

“For the past several weeks, we have been encouraging people to get vaccinated as a preventive measure against getting the flu. Now that we have lab-confirmation of our first cases, we hope this further motivates individuals who have not yet gotten their annual flu shot to do so,” said Dr. Awele Maduka-Ezeh. “Getting a flu shot is quick, easy, and not only protects you, but also those around you.”



DPH urges all Delawareans 6 months of age and older to get vaccinated soon if they have not yet done so. The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it even from seemingly healthy,

but unvaccinated, children and adults. Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body that protect against influenza virus infection, it is important to get the flu shot as early as possible to give your body time to build immunity. The intranasal vaccine (flu mist) is not being recommended this year based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's analysis, which showed the intramuscular vaccine was better at protecting against certain strains of influenza.

Vaccinations not only prevent people from getting the flu, but they can reduce the severity of flu illness and prevent visits to the doctor, clinic, emergency room, hospitalizations, and serious consequences (including death) from influenza. Vaccinated people have less chance of missing family, school and work events due to influenza illness.

Getting a flu vaccination is easy. They are offered through physician offices, many pharmacies and some grocery stores. DPH is also offering flu vaccines at its Public Health clinics in several State Service Centers including some with evening hours. For more information about the flu and where to get vaccinated, visit www.flu.delaware.gov, call 1-800-282-8672, or Google "CDC flu finder" and enter a ZIP code.

On Tuesday Oct. 10, 2017 DPH held a drive-thru flu clinic in Kent County where 887 individuals were vaccinated. This was more than double the number of persons vaccinated at the drive-thru flu clinic in 2016. Last flu season, Delaware had 4,590 confirmed flu cases, 15 of which were fatal.

Delawareans can prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illness with good hygiene: Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and dispose of tissues immediately. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet. Also avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, chills, and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Those sick with the flu should stay home from work, school, and other gatherings and not return until they have been free of fever – with temperature less than 100° F (37.8° C), without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

They should avoid close contact with well people in the household, stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water and other clear liquids. Over the counter medicines can provide symptom relief but if you suspect you have influenza, call your doctor as they may decide to provide antiviral medications to help hasten recovery and prevent serious complications. This is particularly important for those who feel very sick, are pregnant, or have chronic medical conditions.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.